

Message Text

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SUBJ: CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS: ATMOSPHERE AFTER
AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S VISIT

REF: PANAMA 0183

SUMMARY. PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE DECLINED TO COMMENT ON OPTIMISTIC WIRE SERVICE REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON CONCERNING AGREEMENT ON BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW CANAL TREATY. PRIVATELY, THEY HAVE TOLD US THEY WERE PLEASED WITH THE PROGRESS MADE DURING THE RECENT VISIT OF AMBASSADOR BUNKER. BENEATH THE SURFACE, A BASIC SKEPTICISM CONCERNING U.S. INTENTIONS REMAINS IN SOME QUARTERS, AND THE OPPOSITION IS SPREADING CHARGES OF A SELL-OUT BY TORRIJOS. THE FOREIGN MINISTER IN A SPEECH ON JANUARY 9 DEFENDED THE GOP SAYING THE PANAMA'S BASIC POSITION WOULD NOT BE BARGAINED AWAY, AND CONCURRENTLY TOLD PANAMANIANS THAT THEY COULD SOON JUDGE THE FRUITS OF THE RECENT TALKS.
END SUMMARY.

1. SINCE AMBASSADOR BUNKER'S DEPARTURE PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS HAVE REMAINED SILENT CONCERNING THEIR TALKS WITH THE U.S. NEGOTIATORS. HOWEVER, THE LOCAL PRESS HAS CARRIED AP, UPI AND EFE WIRE SERVICE STORIES FROM WASHINGTON ON A DAILY BASIS GIVING
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VARYING VERSIONS OF WHETHER AND ABOUT WHAT AGREEMENT WAS REACHED.

2. THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS THAT AGREEMENT WAS REACHED ON "ISSUES," "PRINCIPLES" AND EVEN A TREATY. TO THE EXTENT THERE IS A COMMON THEME IN THE LOCAL MEDIA REACTION, IT IS THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS ARE GOING WELL. THE ONLY REPORT OF SECRETARY KISSINGER'S PRESS CONFERENCE JANUARY 10 TO APPEAR IN THE MORNING NEWSPAPERS JANUARY 11 WAS AN EFE ARTICLE WHICH MISQUOTED THE SECRETARY AS SAYING THAT AGREEMENT ON PRINCIPLES HAD BEEN REACHED BUT IT HAD NOT YET BEEN APPROVED BY THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT.

3. AMBASSADOR GONZALEZ REVILLA TOLD EMBOFF JANUARY 10 THAT PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS WERE PLEASED WITH THE LATEST ROUND OF TALKS AND THE PROGRESS ACHIEVED TO DATE. ANOTHER FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCE SAID THE MINISTRY HAD BEEN RECEIVING TELEPHONE CALLS CONGRATULATING THE GOVERNMENT FOR HAVING HAD SUCH SUCCESS.

4. WHILE HOPEFUL, PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS AT SECOND AND THIRD LEVELS IN GOP REMAIN WARY AND SUSPICIOUS THAT THE "COLOSSUS OF THE NORTH" MAY BE MANEUVERING PANAMA INTO A DEAD-END STREET. THEY HAVE UPPERMOST IN THEIR MINDS WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS THE HERITAGE OF "UP YEARS OF INJUSTICE, INCOMPREHENSION, OF OPEN OR VEILED HOSTILITY" WHICH ACCORDING TO ONE COMMENTATOR, CAUSES PANAMANIANS TO REACT DEFENSIVELY EACH TIME THEY ENCOUNTER AN AMERICAN CONCERNING CANAL TREATY MATTERS. COLUMNIST MARIO AUGUSTO RODRIGUEZ COMMENTED THAT WASHINGTON IN THE PAST HAS ALWAYS TALKED OF "COMPREHENSION" AND "CORDIALITY" BUT NEVER ADVANCED AN INCH IN ANY ESSENTIAL MATTER CONCERNING PANAMA. DESPITE THIS, HE CONTINUES, WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF BUNKER AND KISSINGER THIS NEW ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS COULD BE DECISIVE AND THEREFORE ARE BING RECEIVED WITH OPTIMISM BY THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE.

5. TORRIJOS' OPPOSITION, SENSING PROGRESS IN IMPROVING U.S.- PANAMANIAN RELATIONS, IS SEEKING TO DISCREDIT TORRIJOS BY SPREADKING STORIES THAT HE HAS "SOLD OUT" TO THE U.S. FOREING MINISTER TACK, IN A SPEECH TO STUDENT AND NATIONAL GUARD OFFICERS AT RIO HATO JANUARY 9 ATTEMPTED TO UNDERCUT CRITICS BY ASSERTING THAT PANAMA'S BASIC POSITION IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WAS NOT SUBJECT TO BARGAINING. PANAMA WAS RESOLVED TO "COMPLETE CONFIDENTIAL

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ITS INDEPENDENCE" AND THEREFORE THE "COLONIAL ENCLAVE" WOULD HAVE TO DISAPPEAR, THE LAND RESTORED TO ITS OWNER AND THE WATERWAY WOULD REVERT TO THE SOVEREIGN STATE. THE FRUITS OF THE POSITION TAKEN BY PANAMA'S LEADERS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BE FORTHCOMING "IN THE NEAR FUTURE" AND THEN THE PEOPLE OF PANAMA WOULD BE ABLE TO JUDGE WHETHER THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT HAD KEPT FAITH WITH THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES ON JANUARY 9, 1964 IN THE CAUSE OF PANAMA'S SOVEREIGNTY. TACK SAID PANAMA HAD GONE

ALONG WITH TEN YEARS OF FRUITLESS NEGOTIATIONS IN ORDER TO AVOID HAVING NEW MARTYRS.

66. COMMENT. THE ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING TREATY NEGOTIATIONS REMAINS POSITIVE. ALTHOUGH PANAMANIAN SPEAKERS ON JANUARY 9 MADE SOME RHETORIC BLASTS AT PREVIOUS U.S. POLICY CONCERNING THE CANAL ZONE, NOTHING WAS DONE TO UPSET THE NEGOTIATIONS AND TACK'S SPEECH WAS BOTH AN ATTEMPT TO DEFEND THE GOP AGAINST CHARGES OF "SELL-OUT" AND TO PREPARE THE PUBLIC TO ACCEPT AN CNNOUNCEMENT OF AGREEMENT ON PRINCIPLES AS A VICTORY FOR PANAMANIAN POLICY.

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